

## Retreat and Evacuation at Dunkerque

### 26 May to 4 June 1940

On 23 May, the 1st Panzer Division, commanded by General der Panzertruppen Friedrich Kirchner, swung around Calais cutting through British detachments to move against Dunkerque. That night the division reached the Aa Canal and established four bridgeheads on its opposite bank. On 24 May, Hitler issued the much-debated 'Halt Order,' stopping all offensive movements of his panzer divisions. The explanations offered for this action differ, but the three-day delay gave allied units an opportunity to consolidate the pocket's perimeter. At this time the port was part of the northern coastal defenses commanded by amiral Jean Abrial.<sup>1</sup> Dunkerque was defended by général Marie Bertrand Fagalde's French XVI Corps and other units of the Secteur Fortifié de Flanders.<sup>2</sup> The German thrust to the channel modified the dynamics of the air war because German ground units were farther away from their air support and closer to RAF bases across the channel in Kent.

The evacuation of unnecessary personnel started on 21 May. By midnight of 26 May, 27,936 men had been evacuated from the ports of Boulogne-sur-Mer, Calais, Dunkerque, and Oostend. By that date, Boulogne and Calais had been captured. The Belgian Army held the line along the Lys River; however, German pressure caused it near to collapse. On 28 May, the Belgian Army surrendered and British II Corps (Lieutenant-General Alan Brooke) quickly moved into the gap. Only Dunkerque remained a viable option for removal of fighting troops.

German armor resumed its movement toward Dunkerque on 27 May, but its progress was slowed by the strengthened defense. Two days later leading panzer divisions were withdrawn to be conserved for the final push south of the Somme River and the remainder became the anvil upon which the second-rate infantry divisions of the less-mechanized Army Group B would be the hammer.

<b>Objective</b>	To evacuate the British Expeditionary Force from France
<b>Forces</b>	
<b>British:</b>	9 divisions of BEF (General John Vereker, 6th Viscount Gort) <sup>3</sup>
<b>French:</b>	2 divisions (amiral Jean Abrial)
<b>German:</b>	10 divisions of Eighteenth Army (General der Artillerie Georg von Küchler)
<b>Result</b>	198,315 British and 139,911 Allied (mostly French) troops were rescued
<b>Casualties</b>	
<b>British:</b>	11,014 Killed, 14,074 wounded, 41,338 PoW or MIA
<b>French:</b>	1,230 casualties and 40,000 taken prisoner
<b>German:</b>	Unknown
<b>Location</b>	Dunkerque is 290 km north of Paris

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<sup>1</sup> Amiral Jean Abrial was one of the last to be evacuated from Dunkerque. Abrial became commander of the port of Cherbourg until forced to surrender that port to the Germans. He collaborated with the Vichy Regime in France until 1943 as governor of Algeria. He was tried by the new French Republic and sentenced to ten years in prison in 1947 but granted amnesty in 1954. He died in 1962, aged 83.

<sup>2</sup> Général Marie Bertrand Fagalde was captured on 18 June and imprisoned in Koenigstein Castle near Dresden until liberated by the Soviet Army in May 1945. Upon return to France, Fagalde was indicted for cooperating with the enemy during his imprisonment. He initially accepted an offer to join the Waffen SS, but withdrew when asked to wear a German uniform. The charges against him were eventually dropped. Fagalde died in 1966, aged 87.

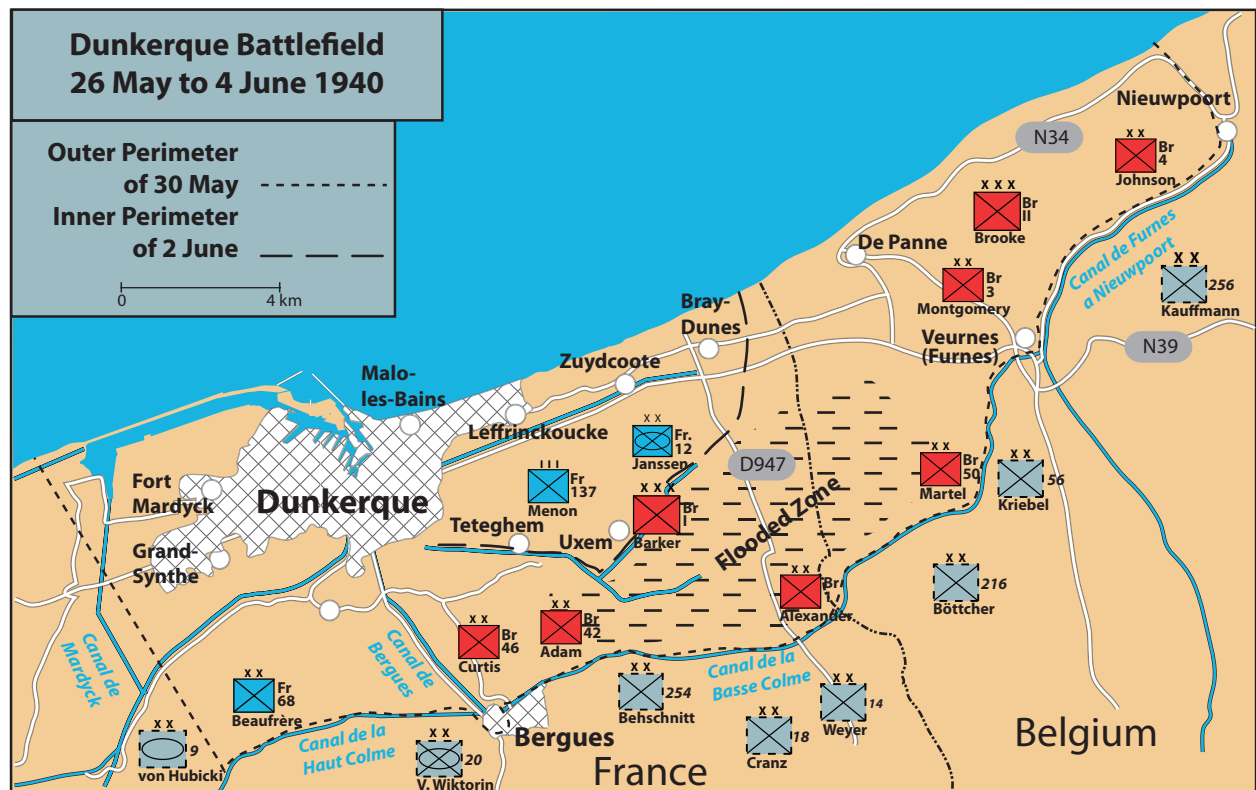
<sup>3</sup> Lord Gort, disliked by Churchill, never again commanded combat troops. He died in March 1946, aged 59.

## Battle

Since the French High Command seemed unable to establish or implement a plan of action against the encircling German divisions, as early as 19 May BEF commander Lord Gort suggested that plans be developed for evacuation of British forces from the continent. Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsey, <sup>4</sup>British naval officer in charge of channel operations, gave the order to commence Operation Dynamo at 15:00 on 26 May, four hours before receiving formal permission from Minister of War Anthony Eden. At risk were 200,000 men of the BEF and an unknown number of French, Belgians, and other allies.

Allied interests were in conflict. The British felt they needed breathing space to re-equip their army. The French felt an evacuation would free German units for full scale attack southward. The evacuation was well under way before the French understood what the British were doing.

Général Fagalde assumed responsibility for the western perimeter from the English Channel to Bergues, and the British assumed responsibility for the eastern perimeter from Bergues along the Canal de la Basse Colme to Nieuwpoort. Purposeful flooding reduced the distance of British defense to a small section of the canal bank east of Bergues. The evacuation effort started slowly, and expectations that much of the BEF could be successfully rescued were low.

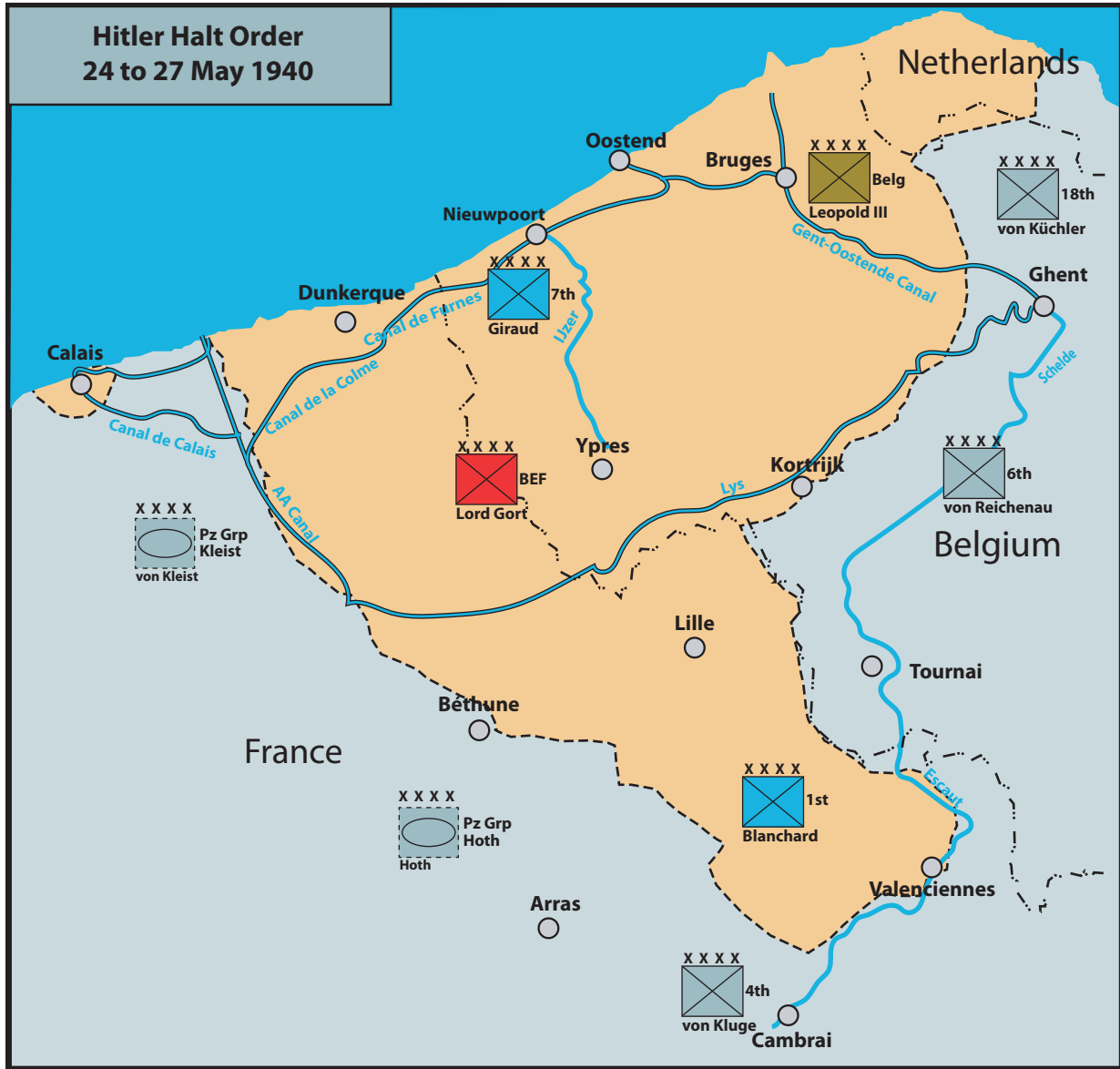


The retreating BEF fought rearguard actions while moving units towards the beaches between Dunkerque and De Panne. Units of the British 44th and 48th Infantry Divisions established strongpoints along the main highways leading north towards Bergues and Furnes assisted by the 'Halt Order' which stopped the onrush of German armored divisions.

On 27 May, intense Luftwaffe bombing of the port facilities rendered much of them useless; the main lock gate was disabled, a blazing tanker already blocked access to the inner harbor, and other wrecks made navigating the narrow seaward approaches hazardous. The Luftwaffe then attacked the city of Dunker-

<sup>4</sup> Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsey, who later developed the naval plans for the Invasion of Normandy, died in a plane crash in January 1945.

que, using incendiary devices to set the town on fire. Naval officers directed evacuees to beaches east of the harbor between Dunkerque and La Panne to avoid the blazing buildings, crumbling walls, and blocked streets. Small boats began a shuttle between the beaches and larger vessels in deeper water, but the process was slowed by difficulties in hauling near-drowned men into small boats driven by large tidal swings and offshore currents. That night, the French 68th Division (général Maurice Beaufrière) shortened the western perimeter defense by withdrawing to the stronger Canal de Mardyck Line.



At the western end of the evacuation beaches, the 1.6-kilometer-long East Mole – the British soldier’s name for the lengthy break water – jutted straight out to the sea from the harbor entrance. Much of its length consisted of piles driven into the sand bed, which supported an 8-foot-wide wooden walkway. Evacuation from the East Mole began during the night of 27 May and continued off and on for seven days until 239,555 men escaped along its occasionally teetering planks.

Rain began on 28 May, and low clouds mixed with greasy smoke of burning oil tanks provided air cover from the Luftwaffe. Passenger ships, warships, fishing boats, and coastal ferries continued the dangerous task of navigating minefields and sand bars to reach the mole, all the while avoiding bombers and

shore artillery. After unloading the men at Dover, they returned to France to do it all over again.

Lord Gort did not meet with his counterpart, amiral Abrial, at his headquarters in Bastion 32 until 29 May to disclose to him that the BEF was leaving France. After a flurry of communications between Dunkerque, London, and Paris, the Allies agreed that further evacuations would have French and British soldiers removed in equal numbers. The French felt betrayed by British plans to abandon what they saw as the Dunkerque redoubt. That afternoon the wind shifted and skies cleared, permitting the Luftwaffe to sweep in on targets lining the East Mole. Three destroyers and numerous other craft were lost.

British infantry units continued their fighting retreat, while their comrades made for the escape beaches. By 30 May, all retiring British units were within the perimeter. Since the terrain around Dunkerque was not suitable for armored operations, responsibility for Dunkerque operations was transferred to the infantry divisions of General der Artillerie Georg von K uchler's Eighteenth Army.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1. Dunkerque 26-29 May 1940 (C 1721)**  
**Burning oil tanks at Dunkirk. Copyright:   IWM.**



**Figure 2. British troops await rescue on the beaches near Dunkerque**

<sup>5</sup> Georg von K uchler spent much of the war commanding Army groups on the Eastern Front. K uchler was convicted of war crimes in 1948 for the harsh treatment of Soviet POWs during the winter of 1941-42 and sentenced to 20 years im-



**Figure 3. Destroyed equipment near Dunkerque** ©Bundesarchiv

The high point for the evacuation was reached on 31 May when 68,014 men boarded boats – the East Mole contributing almost two-thirds of the total because it was deemed usable once again. Meanwhile, German artillery had closed the range and beach evacuations of the British 4th Infantry Division became untenable. The troops marched along the dunes towards Dunkerque. The evacuation rate slowed after 1 June, when the Luftwaffe returned, forcing the cancellation of daylight sailings. The final British troops left during the night of 2-3 June; the next night the last 52,921 French troops left the port at 03:45 on 4 June while heavy street fighting continued in the city. Three ships were scuttled to block the harbor after the last ship took the final 383 French troops. At 08:20, général Maurice Beaufrière<sup>6</sup>, now commanding the remaining 80,000 French forces, surrendered the town.

The evacuation totaled 338,226, of which approximately 125,000 were French. The achievement by the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and the naval reservists who manned many of the smaller boats was spectacular. Ship losses totaled 228 craft, including nine destroyers and 60 French naval vessels. The RAF lost 177 aircraft in their engagements with the Luftwaffe, who lost an approximately equal number.<sup>7</sup> The evacuated army left all of their materiel behind, including tanks, transport, artillery and antiaircraft guns, ammunition, rations, and even most of their rifles; however, much of it was rendered useless, since the guns were spiked, the engine blocks holed, and munitions detonated. Winston Churchill put the success in proper perspective, however, in his address to Parliament on 4 June, ‘We must be very careful not to assign to the deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations.’

### Aftermath

With the action north of the Somme ending, the Wehrmacht turned its attention to the rest of France. The main attack started on 9 June with Rundstedt’s Army Group A and another tank-led Blitzkrieg. The French established strong defensive points called ‘hedgehogs,’ but their lack of mechanized units prohibited effective counterattacks. The Germans crossed the Somme, the Aisne, and then the Marne; river barriers

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prisonment. He was released in 1953 and died in 1968, aged 86.

<sup>6</sup> Général Maurice-Frédéric-Gaëtan Beaufrière was captured and held as a prisoner of war until the war’s end. He retired in 1946 and died in 1972, aged 85.

<sup>7</sup> Aircraft losses remain a contentious point with air combat and ground antiaircraft fire double or triple counting enemy losses and propagandists of both sides giving the totals a favorable slant.



**Figure 4. British prisoners at Dunkerque march into five years of captivity.** Photo: 242-EB-2-45 ©NARA

that had held the enemy 25 years previous now provided only temporary delays in the age of mobile warfare. The government, having previously moved to Tours and then to Bordeaux, declared Paris an open city and on 14 June, the Germans repeated their march down the Champs d'Élysée as in 1871. The French government was re-formed with the hero of Verdun, maréchal Henri Pétain, as the new premier; however, French units were rapidly collapsing. A delegation led by General Huntziger finally met with the Chief of the German Wehrmacht, Generaloberst Wilhelm Keitel, in the forest at Compiègne, in the same railway car in which the Armistice of 1918 had been signed. The site selection demonstrated Hitler's desire for revenge upon France. No negotiations were allowed, and at 20:50 on 22 June 1940, the armistice was signed. The conquered countries thus entered their four-year purgatory of occupation.

In September 1944, the Canadian Army, sweeping up the coast, bypassed Dunkerque, considering its canal defense too strong to risk attack. The German garrison finally surrendered on 10 May 1945 — two days after the war was officially over.

## Battlefield Tour

The tour begins in Cassel, France reviewing British efforts to delay the German advance while the bulk of the BEF was retreating toward the beaches east of Dunkerque. (50.799503, 2.487796)

### Cassel

Toward the end of May 1940 the western flank of the British Expeditionary Force and the Cassel sector was defended by the British 48th and 44th Divisions. Cassel lies at the junction of major highways and its strategic elevation provided observation over the surrounding flat countryside.

Brigadier Nigel Somerset commanding 145 Brigade received orders to withdraw to Cassel where he found an ad hoc mixture of regiments including the 2nd Battalion, Gloucester Regiment, the 1st and 4th Battalions, Ox & Bucks Light Infantry, 367 Battery of the 140th Field Regiment and a miscellany of Royal engineer, signal, and medical personnel. His efforts were to protect at all costs the BEF's western escape corridor to Dunkirk along a 20 mile front centered on Cassel.

On 27 May, German Rifle Brigade 6 (Oberst Hans-Karl Eisebeck) started simultaneously from the west, south and south-east, using infantry supported by machine guns, mortars and tanks. A company, Ox and Bucks was overrun from the southwest and Somerset ordered A Company to withdraw toward Zuyt-pene. The order never arrived and the unit was forced to surrender.

On 29 May, a heavy and sustained attack preceded by a concentrated and accurate mortar bombardment directed against the entire battalion position. Two attempts were made to break the Germans encirclement, both were thrown back into the city. Oberleutnant Hans-Günther Bethke and his #5 Kompanie, II Battalion, Panzer Regiment 11 destroyed five British tanks, four Carden-Lloyd carriers, and two anti-tank guns during their attack on Cassel.<sup>8</sup> Seven hundred prisoners were eventually captured, including Brigadier Somerset and two regimental commanders.<sup>9</sup>

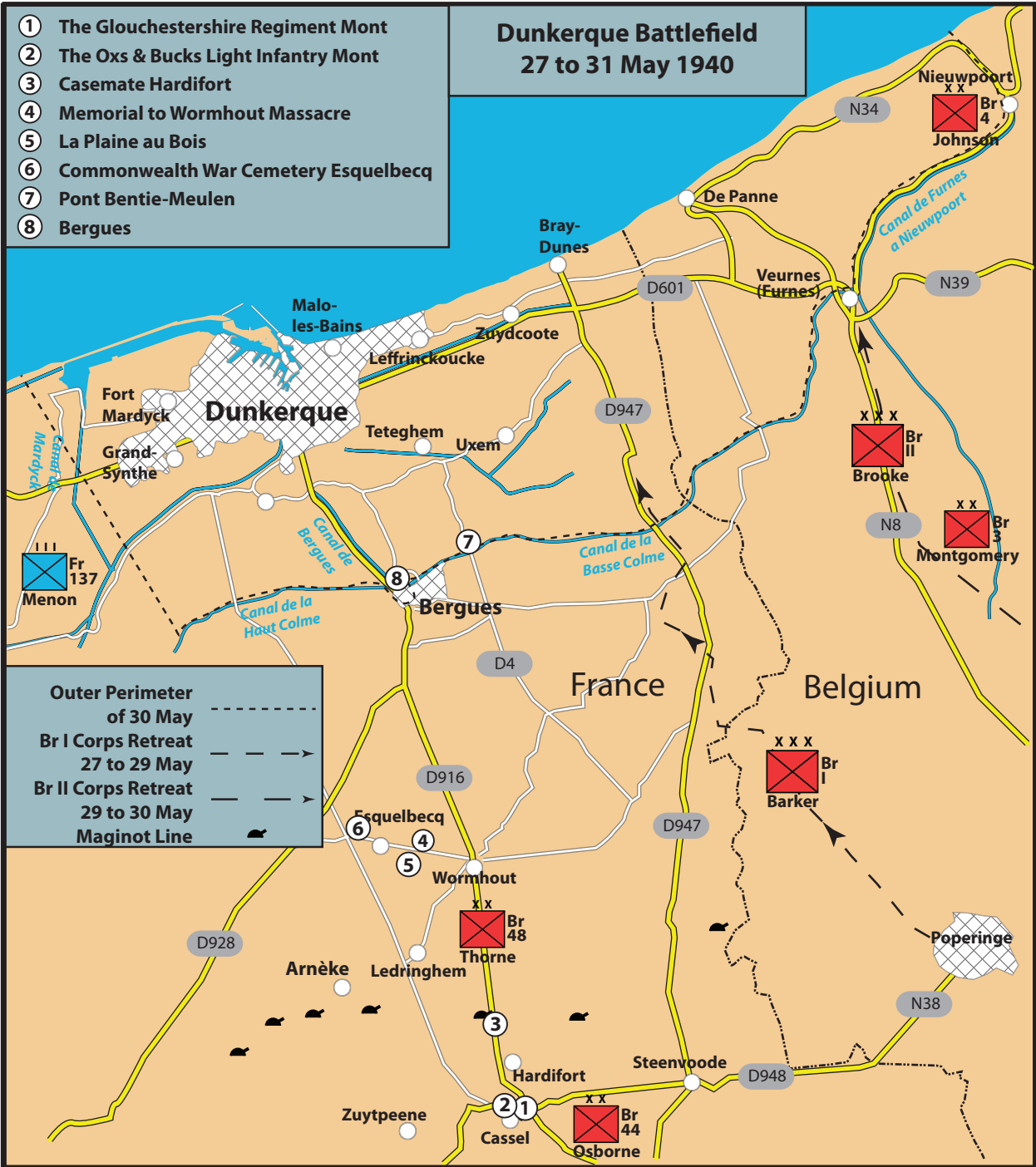
Cassel's 500-foot mound, which stands above the flat plain of Flanders, was defended by various armies during city's history. Roadways twist and turn as they wind up into the town center where small cafes, restaurants and pâtisseries offer refreshments. Buildings show a definite Flemish influence with their stepped gables and narrow facades.

The place in front of the Collégiale Notre-Dame-de-la-Crypte church presents the city's memorial

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Günther Bethke was awarded the Knight's Cross of the iron Cross for bravery. He was killed in fighting near Leningrad in September 1942, aged 29.

<sup>9</sup> Brigadier Somerset remained a PoW in various camps until liberated by American forces in March 1945. Somerset died in 1990, aged 96.



to the dead of the First World War. Two stone plaques are affixed upon the brick wall surrounding the war memorial. One plaque memorializes Brigadier Nigel Somerset and the 228 officers and men of the 2nd & 5th Battalions, **The Gloucestershire Regiment**, who fought and died from Cassel to Ledringhem, covering the evacuation of the British and French forces at Dunkirk from 14 – 29 May 1940.

The second similar plaque bears inscription dedicated to the memory of the officers and men of the 4th Battalion, **The Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry**, who fought and died defending Cassel over the same period.

A section of the Communal Cemetery is devoted to **British war graves** holding 111 dead — 19 of which are unidentified. (50.799533, 2.49250173)

Leave Cassel north on highway D916 toward Le Peckel. After 4.0 km turn left onto Rte de Wemaers-Cappel (D338) then quickly right onto Chem. de la Wissche. Exit the first traffic circle toward the casemate on the right. (50.825844, 2.478033)

### Casemate Hardifort

Built in 1940 as a northern extension of the Maginot Line, Casemate Hardifort presents six gun embrasures: two holding 25-mm antitank guns, two for Hotchkiss machine guns, and the final two for defense of the position. In addition four chutes allow utilizing grenades against attacking troops that reach the walls. The casemate is located along highway D916, one of the evacuation axes of the BEF towards Dunkirk.

Abandoned by French troops, the casemate is occupied by the British. No 8 Platoon (2nd Lieutenant RW Cresswell), A Company, 2nd Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment. At approximately 18:00 on 26 May, German infantrymen began attacking the casemate and the British platoon was quickly isolated losing contact with the rest of the unit. After four days of continuous fighting, the situation became desperate since ammunition supply was almost exhausted and combat rations were running out.

The resistance became a thorn in the German advance towards Dunkirk. As a ploy, on 29 May a wounded British officer was forced out of a field ambulance and was urged to induce Cresswell and his men to surrender. The officer, Captain Lorraine, discretely warned Cresswell that German soldiers were posted in ambush on the roof of the casemate ready to capture the British as soon as they were released. The fighting continued until 30 May, when the Germans were again on the roof and the casemate was on fire. Escape was impossible and all the survivors were captured.<sup>10</sup>

The casemate was sited northwest of the intersection of highway D916 and Rte de Wemaers-Cappel with its embrasures aimed toward the intersection. However, the construction of modern factory buildings now blocks that view. Casemate Hardifort is particularly easy to view with a parking area and paved pathway circling the structure. Entrance into the structure is prohibited.

Return to highway D916 and continue north toward Bergues. In the center of Wormhout, turn left onto Pl. du Général de Gaulle (D17) and continue west for 1.7 km to the memorial on the left. (50.884785, 2.445112)

### Wormhout

The **Memorial to Wormhout Massacre** lies midway between the two towns along highway D17. The clean, upright stone plaque recalls the execution of British PoWs an act known as Le Paine au Bois. On 28 May, the commander of the notorious 1st SS Panzer Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler' SS-Obergruppenführer Josef Dietrich came under fire while traveling in his car. Dietrich's driver was killed and Dietrich took shelter in a roadside ditch where he was trapped for most of the day. Out of touch with his troops, they believed their commander had been killed. Captive members of The Royal Warwickshire Regiment, The Cheshire Regiment, and The Royal Artillery were murdered near this spot possibly in revenge. See La Plaine au Bois below.

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<sup>10</sup> Cresswell and Lorraine survived the conflict to be awarded the Military Cross for their heroic action between 26 and 30 May.



Continue east on highway D17 toward Esquelbecq. Shortly before entering the town, find Rue des Dunkirk Veterans identified with a white sign 'Mémorial La Plaine au Bois.' Follow for 1.0 km to a roadside parking area. (50.878872, 2.444047)

### **La Plaine au Bois (The Plain in the Woods)**

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Warwickshire Regiment, The Cheshire Regiment and The Royal Artillery were dispatched to the Wormhout area to delay the advancing enemy for as long as possible. They were hopelessly outnumbered and already short of ammunition. After five hours of fierce combat the small group's survivors were taken prisoner by II Battalion, 1st SS Panzer Division. The SS men marched the approximately 100 captives into an isolated small cowshed before throwing two grenades into the barn. Company Sergeant Major Augustus Jennings and Sergeant Stanley Moore threw themselves on grenades suppressing the impact of the blasts. The Germans then opened fire with machine guns. Captain James Lynn-Allen, D Company commander, escaped dragging severely wounded Private Albert Evans along a hedgerow keeping their heads down to avoid observation. Both men were discovered 200 yards away near a pond and were shot by an SS officer and fell into the pond. Lynn-Allen was dead, but Evans collapsed into the pond as if dead. After several minutes, Evans crawled out of the water and made his way to the Bollengier farm. A local doctor applied first aid and took him to a hospital where his shattered arm was amputated.<sup>11</sup> Captain Lynn-Allen's body was never found despite post-war dredging of the pond.

Meanwhile, the bloodbath in the cow shed continued as the SS failed to kill everyone, groups of five survivors were taken outside and callously shot in the back. When rain started the executions continued inside the barn. Bursts of gunfire fell upon the unhurt, the wounded, and those already dead. Only fifteen of the one hundred prisoners survived to be discovered three days later.

After the war, Waffen SS troops who perpetrated the murders in and around Wormhout refused to admit responsibility for their actions. Survivors and witnesses testified that Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Mohnke, promoted that day to battalion commander, was involved in ordering the massacre.<sup>12</sup>

The Bollengier farm is visible behind the belvedere. At one point a German soldier sitting on his tank was shot. SS troops quickly put the Bollengier family against a wall threatening their execution. French Private Robert Vanpee, a local depot guard, surrendered to the Germans claiming to have fired the shot. The family was saved; Vanpee was executed.<sup>13</sup>

A reconstructed, thatch-covered cowshed, its interior walls covered with poppy wreaths and military symbols, has become a pilgrimage site for veterans. A belvedere was built with sediment extracted from two ponds. An orientation table atop the belvedere presents the British positions on 28 May and the movements of the Nazi troops. The entire site has been surrounded by forty English oak trees, each dedicated to one of the victims. Nearby a stele was erected in memory of the combatants and civilians who fell during the Second World War in this part of Flanders.

Return to highway D17 and turn left. Proceed through Esquelbecq for 1.3 km then turn left onto Rue du Souvenir. The cemetery is ahead. (50.886768, 2.416048)

<sup>11</sup>Private Albert Evans of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment managed to crawl away from the massacre site and was picked up by a German ambulance unit. He survived the war as a PoW and passed away in 2013 at age 92.

<sup>12</sup>At the war's end, Mohnke was personally appointed by Hitler as the kommandant for the defense of the government district of Berlin. After Hitler's suicide, Mohnke surrendered to the Red Army to spend ten years in Soviet captivity. Wilhelm Mohnke was never brought to trial over these allegations, and when the case was reopened in 1988, a German prosecutor came to the conclusion there was insufficient evidence to bring charges. In 1944, Mohnke was implicated in the killing of thirty-five Canadian prisoners at Fontenay-le-Pesnel, Normandy, but again never prosecuted. Mohnke died in 2001, aged 90.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Vanpee, aged 38, is buried in the Commonwealth War Cemetery Esquelbecq.

### Commonwealth War Cemetery Esquelbecq

The cemetery was opened in April 1918 to hold the First World War casualties resulting from the German Flanders Offensive against Canadian and Australian troops in this area. The site originally held casualty clearing stations. The cemetery was reopened during the Second World War for the burial of those killed during the German advance of May 1940 and the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force to Dunkirk.

The cemetery contains 578 Commonwealth burials of the First World War and 47 from the Second World War who are interned near the Cross of Sacrifice. Sergeant Stanley Moore and CSM Augustus Jennings are among the British burials in plot three, row F. The graves in this row are not specifically identified but noted as ‘buried near this spot.’ Three flight lieutenants and one flight sergeant from 7 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force who died on 24 June 1944 are also buried together in this cemetery.

Four French burials are north of the Cross and eight German burials are in the sunken southwestern corner of the cemetery.

Return to highway D17 and turn left. After 1.0 km, at the roundabout take the 1st exit onto Voie Romaine (D52). After 1.2 km, turn right onto Rte de Saint-Omer (D928) and follow for 5.3 km back to highway D916. Turn left. In La Croix Rouge turn right onto highway D110. After 3.3 km turn left onto highway D4 and follow for 2.6 km to the canal bridge. (50.982793, 2.467390)

### Pont Bentie-Meulen

On 31 May, the 1st Battalion, East Lancashire Fusiliers took up positions as rear guards for the Dunkerque evacuation. Captain Marcus Ervine-Andrew's B Company was sited along a 1000-yard front on the Canal de la Basse Colme. At dawn on 1 June the first enemy soldiers made repeated attempts to reach the canal bank despite effective British fire. By midmorning, Germans had crossed the canal on both flanks of B Company, still holding near the destroyed Pont Bentie-Meulen. Fighting off the attack from the roof of a barn, Andrews personally accounted for seventeen enemy despite mortar shells and armor piercing bullets shattering the roof. With the barn on fire and ammunition almost exhausted, Andrews led the eight survivors of the platoon back to company positions. By 16:30, the last resupply of ammunition finally ran out and Andrews ordered a retreat for the handful of men able to move by wading through over one mile of water filled fields and ditches.<sup>14</sup>

Highway D3 follows the Canal de la Basse Colme through commercial and residential sections of Bergues skirting along its northern edge to gain highway D916 toward Dunkerque Turn left (south) onto highway D916 for a look at the medieval fortified city. After 750 meters turn left and enter through the Porte de Cassel.

### Bergues Office de Tourisme

Place Henri Billiaert

59380 Bergues

Tel: 33 (0)3 28 68 71 06

Web: <https://www.ot-hautsdeflandre.fr/en/prepare-your-stay/our-tourist-office/our-offices/bergues-tourisme>

In May 1940, Oberleutnant Gerhard Voigt, #2 Company, Pionier-Bataillon 18, 18th Infantry Division was awarded the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross for heroism during the attack upon Bergues According to the citation: ‘Despite the danger of friendly fire from attacking Stukas, he pushed close to the Bergues

<sup>14</sup> Captain Harold Marcus Ervine-Andrews was awarded the Victoria Cross for his courage and devotion to duty. Ervine-Andrews, the last surviving Irishman to have received the Victoria Cross, died in 1995, aged 83.



Figure 5. Bergues Bellfroi ©French Battlefields



Figure 6. Bergues Potre de Cassel ©French Battlefields

fortress wall to secure a decisive advantage over the defenders before they took up battle positions. This lightning fast action thus forced them to preemptively surrender.’

Bergues was devastated by bombardment in World War I, and again in 1940 during the Battle of Dunkerque. The city was entered on 2 June that year with 80% of it in ruins. Although reconstruction modernized its buildings, they retained their Flemish style. Its destroyed belfry recovered its fifty-bell carillon in 1961 and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Bergues has four old gates which were originally the only ways to get into the town. Two new gates were created for the train. Almost the entire town is inside the walls with a five-kilometer walk around the town ramparts.

The road from Bergues to Dunkerque is a pleasant drive along the Canal de Bergues.

### Office de Tourisme

Le Beffroi, Rue de l’Amiral Ronarc’h

59140 Dunkerque

Tel: +33 (0)3 28 26 27 28

Email: [contact@dunkerque-tourisme.fr](mailto:contact@dunkerque-tourisme.fr)

Web: <https://www.dunkirk-tourism.com/>

Open every day from 10:00 to 13:00 and 14:00 to 18:00.

Dunkerque presents the visitor with the usual difficulties of navigating any unfamiliar urban locale. Dunkerque compounds these issues with an almost bewildering array of canals and waterways. The sites most related to the events of 1940 are fortunately clustered on the eastern edge of the city, near its junction

with the resort community of Malo-les-Bains. The evacuation beaches include Malo-les-Bains and Bray Dunes and La Panne to the east, with their long brick esplanades and water-facing apartment blocks. Separating the towns are undulating sand dunes sparsely covered with grass and the occasional French fort or German Atlantic Wall bunker.

The Anglo-French defensive lines, often based on waterways and their bridges, offer little to visit. Obsolete fortifications at Forts Castelnau, Vallières, Louis, and Dunes played small parts in the battle and have been converted to other private or public uses. Clusters of blockhouses dot the outskirts of the city but are generally of later construction and not easily accessible.

The road from Bergues to Dunkerque is a pleasant drive along the Canal de Bergues on highway D916 following signs to Malo-les-Bains as the road changes names several times. Turn left onto Quai des Américains, after 260 m turn right onto Rue du Contre-Torpilleur le Triomphant, and finally turn left onto Rue des Chantiers de France to the museum on the right.

Dunkerque can also be entered from east or west, utilizing exit #62 from the A16 Autoroute direction Dunkerque - Centre. Proceed toward Malo-les-Bains (D635), becomes Av du Stade. After 500 m turn left onto Bd Sainte-Barbe Turn left immediately after crossing Canal des Moères onto Rue du 110ème Régiment d'Infanterie. After 750 m, turn left onto Bd Paul Verleythen quickly right onto Av des Bains. Turn left onto Rue du 110ème Régiment d'Infanterie (necessary because of one-way streets) which becomes rue des Chantiers de France. (51.046112, 2.381228)

### **Musée Dunkerque 1940**

Courtines of Bastion 32

Rue des Chantiers de France

59140 Dunkirk

Tel: +33 (0)3 74 06 02 81

Web: <http://www.dynamo-dunkerque.com/>

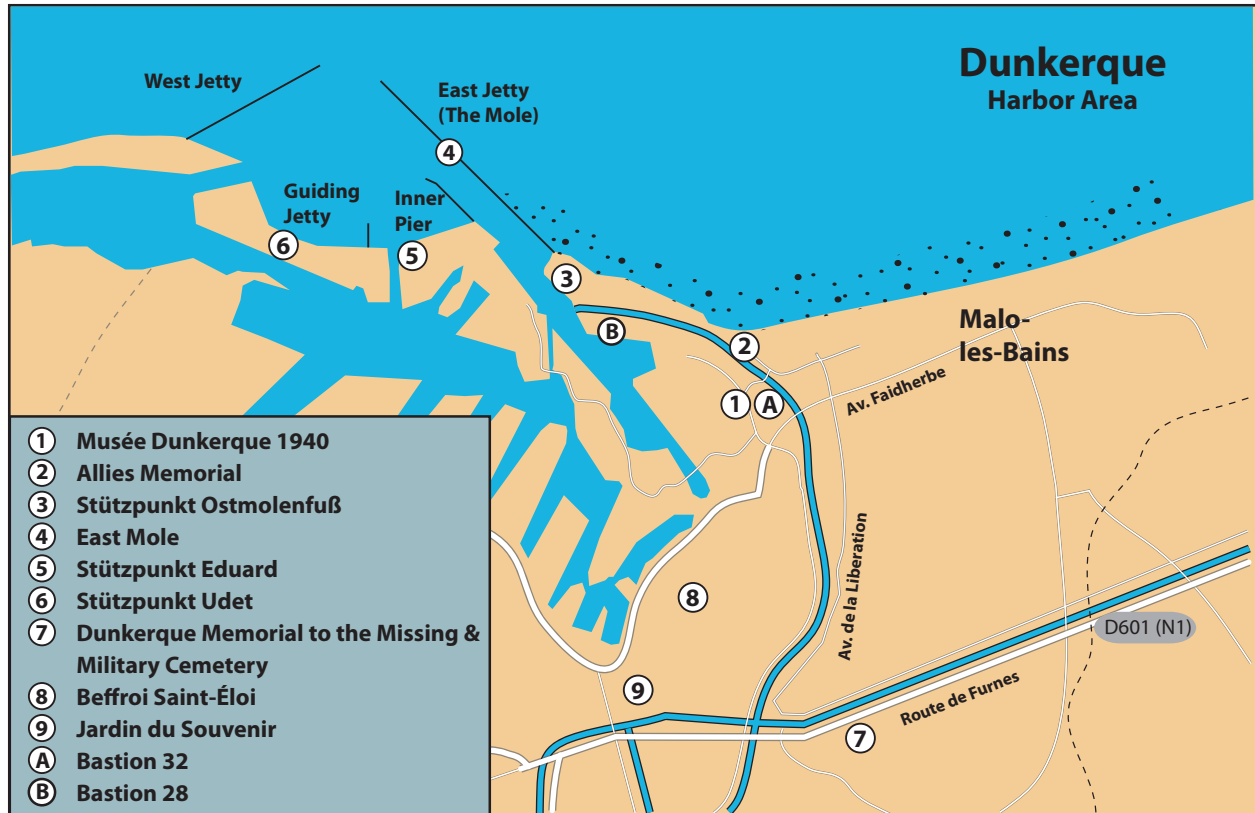
The museum is open every day from 10:00 to 18:00. Fee.

The brick façade houses the **Operation Dynamo Museum** in the concrete and steel casemates of Bastion 32. The 19th century fortification, constructed in 1874, became the French Command Post of amiral Abrial and général Fagalde. It was from there that they left the city for England during the night of 3 June. The area was later transformed with bunkers by the German army. Most of the defense works are gone, having been demolished during the construction of the Zone Neptune industrial and maritime center. Much of Bastion 32 was destroyed in 1978 to allow expansion of the port facilities.

The recently renovated, arched-roof, bunker-like building holds twelve rooms of artifacts, weapons, a diorama of the evacuation, and enlargements of photographs from the period. A 12-minute film introduces the subject to visitors. The photographs of desperate men clinging to leaving ships and boats and images of abandoned equipment along the beach front are dramatic.

A stone structure bearing a metal form of the head and torso of the famous French First World War fighter pilot **Georges Guynemer** and the medallion image of his aircraft stands 58 meters south of the museum entrance. Guynemer shot down fifty-three enemy aircraft before meeting his own unexplained death in September 1917. (51.045381, 2.381448)

**Widerstandsnest (WN) S** consists of a model 515 bunker located on the higher ground in the park behind the museum. The structure presents a well-preserved but partially buried infantry control bunker with a machine gun embrasure. (Parking: 51.046584, 2.382238; WN S: 51.04634, 2.38175)



Continue on rue des Chantiers de France to the next intersection and then turn right. Just before crossing the bridge a plaque on the wall to the right identifies this landscaped hill as part of Bastion 32. Fortifications spread along the northeastern side of the harbor, providing a number of casemates, bastions and other constructions. Cross the bridge over the drainage channel, turn left onto rue Marcel Saily, and continue to the Plage des Allies. (51.048382, 2.380857)

On the edge of the beach at the harbor entrance stands the **Allies Memorial** dedicated to the soldiers, sailors, and airmen — both French and Allies — who made the rescue possible. The memorial is constructed of paving stones from the port facilities traversed by departing soldiers. It bears the memorial statement: ‘To the glorious memory of the aviators, marines and soldiers of the French and Allied armies who sacrificed during the battle of Dunkerque May June 1940’ and the coat of arms of Dunkerque.

Beaches and dunes stretch to the east where long lines of soldiers waited to embark from the mole or sought shelter from Stuka bombs or Messerschmidt machine guns. The broad expanse of sand expanded and contracted with the tides, bringing grief to the sailors handling the shallow draft boats used to transport the men to larger vessels. To help with the loading, artificial jetties were constructed by driving long rows of lorries onto the beach at low tide.



Figure 7. Allies Memorial ©French Battlefields



Figure 8. British and French vehicles left behind Malo-les-Bains Photo: 24-D-100 ©NARA



Figure 9. Malo-les-Bains Beach ©French Battlefields

Climb the steps behind the memorial to access the dike walkway and proceed 900 meters to the fortifications near the base of the East jetty. (51.049931, 2.367947)

**Stützpunkt Ostmolenfuß** held a 47-mm antitank gun, a 50-mm fortress gun, two 20-mm anti-aircraft guns and two machine guns protecting the entrance to Dunkerque harbor. Although partially sand filled, many of the gun embrasures are still visible in this undamaged structure.

Walk out upon the East Mole. (51.051630, 2.366553)

To the northwest is the long **East Mole**, along which orderly groups of men sprinted to board rescue vessels. Bombs pierced the wooden walkways in places, but soldiers used whatever was available, including stretchers or ship's doors, to bridge the gaps. By the end of the evacuation the waters around the mole were a ship's graveyard, with dozens of funnels from sunken vessels sticking out of the water.

One of the myths of Dunkerque is that civilian sailors crossed the channel to effect the beach front rescue operation. The small boats necessary for the beach evacuation were manned by naval reservists, although the occasional fisherman did participate. Most evacuees left via military or large passenger craft using the mole.

Walking along a shortened section of the causeway leading to the East Mole is possible. From the end, the West Mole on the opposite side of the port entrance is barely visible. In 1940, the West Mole bordered upon the port's oil storage facilities and was therefore deemed too dangerous for the ships.

Return to Stützpunkt Ostmolenfuß. Cross the footbridge and continue south to the stair on the left which provide access to the top of Bastion 28. (51.048841, 2.368953)

**Stützpunkt Graft** German Bunker, located on French Bastion 28, holds a cast iron dome for six machine guns manned by 12 troops. This bunker is the last remains of this once strong stützpunkt.

Go back down the stairs to Rue Militarie and continue south 60 meters to the steel structure ahead. (51.048363, 2.369321)

**Calvaire des Marins de Dunkerque** welcomes sailors back to their home port. The 10 meter (32.6 foot) interpretive structure is composed of a rusty-colored water-resistance steel.

Reverse course back over the Canal de Dunkerque à Furnes. Turn left toward Furnes (N1) and continue across the two canal bridges to the Cimetière de Dunkerque. (Entrance from Rte de Furnes: 51.030684, 2.389693)

The **Dunkirk Memorial for the Missing** is accessed across a gated lawn flanked by ten stone and brick tablets that list the names of the 4,534 Commonwealth soldiers who were lost during 1939-1940 operations and who have no known grave listed by unit and alphabetically. An enclosure at the end of the walk holds etched glass panes depicting the evacuation. Two Commonwealth war graves sections can be seen upon entering the **Dunkerque Communal Cemetery** through the columns of the Dunkirk Memorial. Plots IV and V adjacent to the memorial hold fallen from the First World War. Plots I and II hold 793 burials from the Second World War, the majority from the battles around Dunkerque including nine Canadian soldiers who died during the investiture at Dunkerque in September 1944 when the German garrison held out until the war was over eight months later. The Commonwealth section also holds Czech, Norwegian and Polish war graves.



Figure 10. Dunkerque Memorial ©French Battlefields



Figure 11. CWGC Dunkerque ©French Battlefields

Since the city was a port during the First World War, separate Plots I, II and III to the right of the main entrance of the Dunkerque Communal Cemetery contain 460 burials from that war. (Entrance from Rte de Furnes: 51.030684, 2.389693)

The cemetery included French and Belgian sections. A short distance west of the Commonwealth Memorial and separated by the communal cemetery a French cemetery from 1914 to 1918 holds 1,800 graves. (Entrance: 51.029372, 2.387799) Near the southeast corner of the cemetery, a separated plot holds 124 Belgian war graves. (51.027389, 2.388328) Several graves of Polish servicemen are scattered within the cemetery.



Figure 12. Dunkerque Communal Cemetery French Section ©French Battlefields



Figure 13. Dunkerque Communal Cemetery German Section ©French Battlefields

Just outside the cemetery, a naval anchor and airplane propeller front a large stone is dedicated to **Polish sailors and airmen** who fell in France during the Second World War. (51.028752, 2.388629)

**Central Dunkerque** is studded with other war related memorials. They are presented here without instruction to allow visitors to select those of interest.

A cenotaph built into the foot of the Gothic **Belfroi Saint-Éloi de Dunkerque** commemorates French dead of the Great War. The belfry was erected in 1440 and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The carillon houses forty-eight bells atop the 58-meter-high tower. An elevator accesses the narrow spiral stairway to a roof-top terrace, which offers exceptional views of the city, port, and embarkation beaches. Fee for the elevator. The tourism office is also in the belfry on the ground level. (51.035639, 2.376286)

An elaborate eight-meter-high plinth and statue group forms the **Monument aux Morts de 1870**. Erected in 1906 the monument commemorates the fallen of the Franco-Prussian War. The three bronze statues symbolically depict France holding the flag while a wounded sailor attempts to kiss the flag with his dying breath. A mortally wounded infantryman lies to the right. (51.032438, 2.375459).

A bas relief stone wall with a central obelisk commemorates the **Fusiliers-Marins** [French Marines] who fought on the Yser River front in the Great War under command of amiral Pierre Ronarc'h. The elements of the relief depict the battles engaged by this unit including its defense of Dunkerque. (51.031203, 2.371677)

The nearby **Jardin du Souvenir** (Garden of Remembrance) holds a simple polished stone framed by upright textured stones to form a **Memorial to Fallen Members of the Resistance** and a brick stele bearing a polished granite plaque listing the names of members of the local **Jewish community** who were arrested and deported to death camps. (51.030686, 2.371707)

### Embarkation Beaches

The embarkation beaches extended east of Dunkerque to De Panne, Belgium. They have historically been locations for French fortifications against invasion from the sea. The Germans converted some into elements of their Atlantic Wall.

Leave the Dunkerque Memorial east on highway D601 (Rte de Furnes). After 4.3 km, turn left onto highway D79 (Rue de Leffrinckoucke). In the first traffic circle take the first exit onto Rue de Fort, then at the next traffic circle take the second exit onto rue 2 Juin 1940 and follow to the Chemin de Fort entrance. (51.053383, 2.446813)

### Fort des Dunes

Rue du 2 Juin 1940, 59495 Leffrinckoucke

Tel: 33 (0)3 28 29 13 17

Email: [fort-des-dunes@ville-leffrinckoucke.fr](mailto:fort-des-dunes@ville-leffrinckoucke.fr) <[fort-des-dunes@ville-leffrinckoucke.fr](mailto:fort-des-dunes@ville-leffrinckoucke.fr)>;

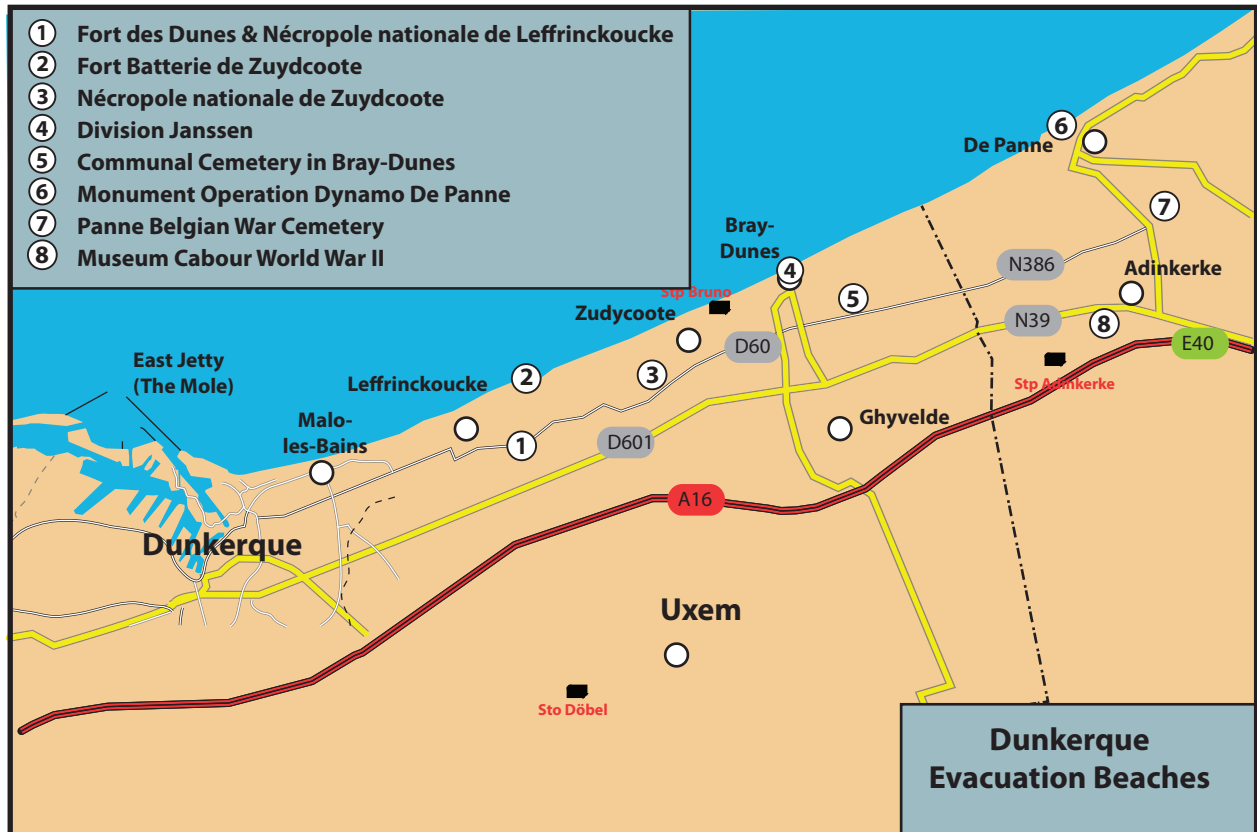
Web: <https://fort-des-dunes.fr/en/>

Open every Tuesday through Sunday March to 3 November from 10:00 to 18:00. Fee. Audio tours available in English.

Constructed between 1878-1880 after the designed by General de Séré de Rivières Fort des Dunes controlled maritime traffic and defended against possible attacks from the sea. The fort served during Operation Dynamo as headquarters of the 12e Division d'Infanterie motorisée. Between 2 and 3 June, the fortress was bombed by Stuka's and bombarded by artillery. Among the French soldiers who perished was the unit's commander général Louis-Guillaume Janssen buried at the French Fort des Dunes War Cemetery.

During the German occupation, a type Würzburg radar installation was placed on top of the for-





tress. The military barracks served as storage for the submarine base in Dunkerque's harbor. On 6 September 1944, eight French resistance members were shot at the fortress. By May 1945, Fort des Dunes held 10,000 German POW's.

The fort is currently a museum presenting videos and displays emphasizing the importance of the location from the 1658 Battle of the Dunes, the Dunkerque evacuation, and the German occupation. Views from the top of the fort are exceptional.

Plaques near the entrance of the fortress commemorate général Janssen and the officers and men of the 12e division d'infanterie motorisée who died defending the evacuation, Lieutenant Colonel Le Notre commander and officers, NCOs, and soldiers of the French 1st Army who fell at their battle stations in the fort on 3 June, and eight members of the French Resistance who were executed here in September 1944.

The cemetery entrance is 100 m north of the Fort des Dunes parking area.

**Fort des Dunes Nécropole nationale de Leffrinckoucke** contains 190 graves from the Second World War. Nineteen unidentified soldiers who fell in June 1940 are buried in an ossuary memorial bearing the appearance of a coffin on a platform. This cemetery also contains the grave of général Janssen, who fell here on 2 June. (51.053978, 2.44449)

From the Fort des Dunes parking area return to the prior traffic circle and proceed west on Rue de Juin 2 1940 (D60). After 1.0 km, turn right onto Rue de Terminus (D79); through the traffic circle onto Av du Large and continue to the beach front. Turn right onto Digue Nicolas II, becomes Digue Europlage, and follow to car park at the end. Walk along the beach 270 meters to the bunkers. (Main bunker: 51.0618147, 2.448066)

### Fort Batterie de Zuydcoote

After the conquest of 1940, Germany began construction of what became known as the Atlantic Wall – an immense project to build observation, fire control, antitank, machine gun, and personnel bunkers supporting artillery casemates from Norway to the French – Spanish border. Generally bomb-proof due to their reinforced concrete construction, the structures may remain for hundreds of years.

The most interesting and best-preserved Atlantic Wall structures in the Dunkerque sector are on the site of a former coastal **Batterie de Zuydcoote** designated by the Germans as **Stützpunkt MKS Malo**. Batterie de Zuydcoote was built from 1877 to 1878 as an annex to Fort des Dunes to the south-west. Thirty French soldiers died here as a result of a Stuka bombardment on 3 June 1940. It was severely damaged by Canadian combat engineers in 1945.

The Batterie de Zuydcoote is accessible to the public. The main observation and control bunker is nearly intact. Four type 671 bunkers held coastal guns, but they are severely damaged and present a danger to enter. The view from the beach is safe and impressive and easily locates the control and gun bunkers. Various shelters and defensive positions are scattered amid the sand dunes. Open-air gun platform for the earlier French battery is also visible.

Reverse directions and return highway D60 and follow for 3.2 km to the cemetery. (51.061489, 2.4845577)

The **Nécropole nationale de Zuydcoote** started in 1921 as an accumulation cemetery for bodies from local hospitals. Eventually 1,140 French, 201 German, one Belgian and one Russian were buried here. In the Second World War the cemetery was re-used for the burial of 909 French soldiers. The French plots are immediately upon passing through the red sandstone gateway and includes one section holding 66 Muslim burials under the traditional pointed stone. Separated from the French section by a tall hedge, the adjacent **Zuydcoote Military Cemetery** holds 327 British graves from the First World War. The one distinctive grave with a differing appearance holds Belgian Army engineer Philemon Van Den Steen. (51.061930, 2.485667)

Continue east on highway D60. After 2.5 km, turn left and follow Av. du Général de Gaulle to the beach front. Park where possible. The monument is directly on the beach. (51.079135, 2.512795)

### Bray-Dunes

A beautifully inscribed stone encased in a frame of stone block commemorates the **Division Janssen** (12eme Division d'infanterie motorisée), which defended this sector of evacuation beach for fifteen days and finally succumbed on 4 June. The unit commander, General Louis-Guillaume Janssen aged 56, was killed during a German bombardment of Fort des Dunes and, as stated above, is buried in the Fort des Dunes French Cemetery. The wind-swept, open beaches extend for miles in both directions demonstrating the exposed nature of the British evacuations.

Two other commemorative plaques that commemorate naval actions off this coast have been attached to the monument.

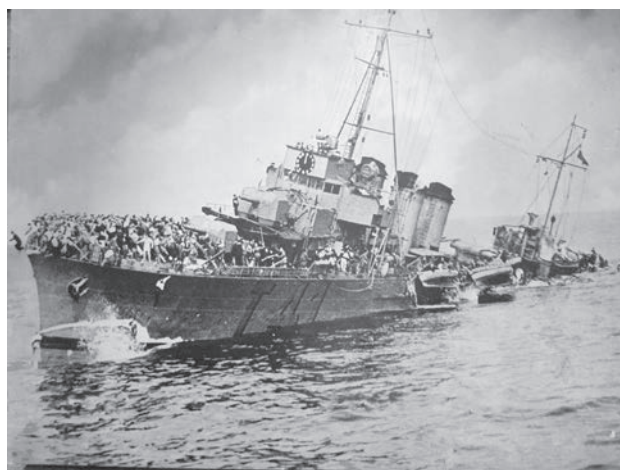


Figure 14. French destroyer Bourrasoue slowly sinking Photo HU2280 ©IWM

The 1,335-ton destroyer *Étandard* was torpedoed and sunk by a German destroyer on 25 April 1917. The ship's entire complement of seventy-two officers and sailors died when the ammunition store exploded. The plaque includes an image of the boat while under construction. The wreckage remains visible at low tide and has been declared a National Landmark. (shipwreck: 51.07969, 2.502455)

The French destroyer *Bourrasoue* sank on 30 May 1940 after hitting a mine in the English channel when evacuating French and British troops during Operation Dynamo. Approximately one-half of the 1,100 soldiers and crew on board died.

Reverse course back to highway D60 and continue east for 700m. Turn right toward Cimetière. (51.070399, 2.526613)

A memorial in **Communal Cemetery in Bray-Dunes** commemorates the three victims of the resistance from Bray-Dunes who were executed in Fort des Dunes on 6 September 1944. They were: Daniel Decroos aged 20, Vincent Dewaele aged 22, and Henri Gedeyne aged 18.

Again continue east for 5.5 km on highway D60 (becomes highway N386 upon crossing the border into Belgium). At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit onto Kerkstraat (N34) and follow for 1.3 km. Continue straight onto Westhoeklaan to the large traffic circle in the center of De Panne. Find parking. Walk along Esplanade Leopold I to the beach front. The memorial is on the beach to the right. (51.100261, 2.581101)

### Monument Operation Dynamo De Panne

The Leopold I Esplanade widens upon approach to the beach. The square arch of black stone commemorate Leopold's arrival here in 1831. Of importance is the smaller modern sculpted gray stone 90 meters to the east. This monument was erected to commemorate the evacuation of the British and allied forces from the beaches of De Panne in May 1940 and also marks the eastern end of the evacuation beaches.



Figure 15. British troops line up on the beach at Dunker-  
quie to await evacuation. ©IWM



Figure 16. British troops drove these vehicles into the sea so that they could use them as a bridge in order to reach their transports. at Da Panne Photo: 26-L-34 NARA

The Witte Berg, 240 meters further east, marks the location of the former Hotel Kursaal, last witness to the evacuations of 1940. During the operation this building was a beacon for the vessels that came to pick up the troops for the crossing to England. In front of the hotel on the beach was also one of the improvised jetties made from abandoned vehicles to bring the men aboard.



**Figure 17. Abandoned British Antiaircraft gun position Photo: 24-D-69 NARA**

Reverse direction and proceed southeast on highway N34. Enter a traffic circle after 2.4 km and take the third exit reversing direction on Kerkstraat. Quickly turn right onto Artiestenpad to the cemetery parking area. (51.086339, 2.601975)

**De Panne Communal Cemetery** contains 259 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War in a separate Commonwealth-section located to the extreme northern corner. The British Commonwealth plot also contains eight Czech and French war graves of the Second World War. The Czech brigade stayed in De Panne in October 1944 and from there took part in the siege of Dunkirk. (51.087995, 2.602443)

**De Panne Belgian War Cemetery** is adjacent to the Communal Cemetery and contains 3,748 graves (including 37 French graves), mostly from the First World War but also from the Second World War. Among the burials are three Belgian civilians who were put under detention, and transported to Abbeville in France. On the 20. May 1940, they had been executed together with 18 others. (Entrance: 51.087587, 2.603138)

Proceed south on highway N34 (changes names several times) for 1.7 km. At the roundabout, take the 1st exit onto highway N39. After 500 m, turn left onto Moeresteenweg to the museum entrance identified by the tank in front. (51.067545, 2.587521)

## **Museum Cabour World War II**

Moeresteenweg 141

8660 De Panne, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)58-42 97 53

Email: [cultuur@depanne.be](mailto:cultuur@depanne.be)

Web: <https://www.depanne.be/en/museum-cabour>

Open 1 April to 5 November every Saturday and Sunday and Tuesday through Sunday during school holidays from 14:00 to 18:00. No admission charge.

This municipal museum is based upon the collection of Robert Moeyaert which was purchased in 2009. The museum illustrates regional events of the Second World War through artifacts, equipment, and touchscreen presentations and features the Belgian 2nd and 4th Lancer Regiments who fought here in both world wars.

## **Other Atlantic Wall Sites:**

Numerous fortifications are to be found in and around Dunkerque befitting its proximity to British shores and its strategic importance as a port city deemed necessary by the Germans for any invasion of the continent. Although most of the fortifications are mere remnants or ruins of massive German construction projects, their presence are a constant reminder of the war and the German occupation of France. They are presented by area to those interested in further exploration. Always remember, these sites can be dangerous but can be safely viewed from a distance.

### Harbor Area:

Many of the German defensive fortification in the central city districts remain, but for the most part, are difficult to view since the city has grown up around them. The following listing includes only those sites that are clearly visible from public land.

**Stützpunkt Eduard** SK Schleuse (Sluice bunker) was constructed to protect critical sluice gates that control tidal water levels in the surrounding countryside. Destruction of the gates would have resulted in flooding the inland territory and devastating German troops movements. (51.052058, 2.355416) A type 621 bunker, which was one of several positions defending the sluice bunker, is visible from Rte de l'Écluse Watier (51.05142, 2.3571)

**Stützpunkt Udet** included two stands for 88-mm Flak (antiaircraft) positions. Over time they were substantially buried in sand and destroyed before being uncovered in 2019. In 1944 there was a FuMG 62 Würzburg D Radar here. The bunker was located at the entrance of the harbor, but it was partially removed and is no longer accessible. Position 2: (51.051917, 2.346031) Position 1: (51.052056, 2.345447)

### Beach area to the east:

**Stützpunkt Bruno** was the Wehrmacht Coastal Battery's observation bunker and fire control station of Battery 8, Artillery Regiment 18. It was also the command post of the #1 Company of I Battalion, Regiment 35. Below a machine gun post and platform for an antitank gun are slowly being devoured by the sands. (51.06621, 2.46575)

**Stützpunkt 049 Adinkerke** was a German field battery of four casemates and one command bunker. There are also remains of trenches here. The battery was heavily bombarded by Allied bombers in 1944 and the damage is still visible. (51.063371, 2.576483)

**Stützpunkt Döbel** displays two 671 bunkers camouflaged as houses. Batterie 5, Army Coastal Artillery Battalion 1244 was stationed here and equipped with four Russian 76.2-mm and German 88-mm cannons. (51.010207, 2.471902)

### Maginot Line:

**Casemate Winnezeele** is almost on the French – Belgian border with its gun embrasures pointing northeast. (50.860496, 2.607316)

**Casemate Ryveld** stands behind farm buildings east of Hardicort. (50.823085, 2.532992)

**Casemate d'Arnèke** is visible across the flat fields of Nord ineffectively hiding behind a post-war tree. The position was armed with a 25-mm AT-gun. (50.826352, 2.422571)

**Casemate Ochtezeele** was a typical defensive position on the extreme north of the Maginot Line. The large casemate presents numerous fighting embrasures and stands near highway D55 with clear views across the flat, open terrain. (50.82051, 2.395786) A second casemate of the same name stands in an open field. (50.819506, 2.380696)

**Casemate Balemberg** was started in 1940 and, as such, only structural work was completed. (50.810922, 2.359039)